

**IN THE CLAIMS**

Please amend claims 20-24, as follows:

1-19. (Canceled)

20. (currently amended) An apparatus for etching a tapered trench in a layer of material, said layer of material having a mask ~~on adjacent~~ a surface thereof, said mask having an opening defining a location on the layer of material at which the trench is to be formed, said apparatus comprising:

an etching tool adapted to enlarge ~~for performing~~ vertical etch process steps on said layer of material; and

an opening enlarging tool adapted to enlarge ~~for performing steps of enlarging~~ said opening in said mask, said etching tool and said opening enlarging tool adapting to operate ~~operating~~ in an alternating manner in order to form a trench of a desired depth in said layer of material.

21. (currently amended) The apparatus according to Claim 20, wherein said mask comprises a resist layer, and wherein said mask opening enlarging tool is adapted to perform ~~comprises a tool for performing~~ resist layer etching ~~etch process steps~~ on said resist layer.

22. (currently amended) The apparatus according to Claim 21, wherein said resist layer is tapered around ~~a the~~ periphery of said opening. ~~to facilitate performing of the resist etch process steps.~~

1           23. (currently amended) The apparatus according to Claim 20, 21, wherein said etching  
2 ~~vertical etch process~~-tool and said opening enlarging resist etch process-tool are incorporated in a  
3 tool that operates in a pulsed manner.

1           24. (currently amended) The apparatus according to Claim 20 21, wherein said etching  
2 ~~vertical etch process~~-tool and said opening enlarging resist etch process tool are incorporated in a  
3 tool that operates in a multi step manner.